

## **Executive Summary**

### **Introduction**

The review team was very encouraged to have found significant strengths in Delaware's programs in such key outcome areas as timely initiation of investigations; services to protect children in their own homes; stability of foster care placements; independent living services; proximity of foster care placements; sibling and relative placements; involvement of children and families in case planning; worker visits with parents and children; and the assessment of the physical and mental health needs of children. The review also found strengths in Delaware's State Systems including the statewide information system; case review system; quality assurance system; training; the array of services available to children and families; the agency's responsiveness to the community; and foster and adoptive parent licensing, recruitment and retention.

In addition, the review also found areas that require improvement by the State. These include certain aspects of child safety, including improved response to repeat maltreatment and improved assessment of risks to children. There are needs in the area of permanency in such aspects as re-entry of children into foster care; making earlier permanency decisions for children; improvements in adoption indicators; and in improved visiting with parents and siblings. There are areas of need in child and family well-being. These include assessment of needs and services for children, parents and foster parents; and meeting the educational needs of children.

### **Key findings Relating to Safety, Permanency and Well-Being**

In order for the State to be determined to be in substantial conformity on any given outcome, the outcome must be determined to be substantially achieved in 90 percent of the cases reviewed in the first review. In addition, the State must meet the national standard that has been established for any statewide aggregate data attached to that particular outcome.

#### **I. Safety**

- 86.49% of the cases reviewed substantially achieved Safety Outcome 1: Children are first and foremost protected from abuse and neglect.

The statewide data indicators for FY 1999 met the national standards for Repeat Maltreatment and Maltreatment of Children in Foster Care.

The review found that Delaware's intervention on initial reports of maltreatment was timely and appropriate and met all State standards.

Case reviews indicated that agency intervention reduced subsequent maltreatment, however there were concerns regarding incidents occurring in open cases that should have been processed as reports.

- 82.86% of the cases reviewed substantially achieved Safety Outcome 2: Children are safely maintained in their homes whenever possible and appropriate.

The Governor of Delaware and the Secretary of DSCYF have identified Child Safety as the number one priority.

Case reviews detailed how multiple services were provided to keep children in their own homes, however there appeared to be limited services in substance abuse and mental health treatment.

Stakeholders indicated that the agency understands and respects the need for families to stay together.

The review found that there were delays in obtaining psychological evaluations of parents and children.

Concerns were identified regarding how safety issues are addressed in out of state DYRS placements

## **Status of Safety Outcomes: Not in Substantial Conformity**

## **II. Permanency**

- 90.91% of the cases reviewed substantially achieved Permanency Outcome 1: Children will have permanency and stability in their living situations.

New data, provided by Delaware on May 30, 2001 for Foster Care Re-entries, indicate that Delaware meets the national standard. The statewide data indicators for FY 1999 indicate that Delaware does not meet the national standard for the Length of Time to Achieve Adoption. The statewide indicators for FY 1999 met the national standards for Stability of Foster Care Placements and Length of Time to Achieve Reunification.

The case review found that few children re-entered foster care and that, where re-entries occurred, they were for appropriate reasons.

Children were found to be stable in their placements and many children were adopted by their foster parents.

The case reviews found that the Permanency Committee met consistently to recommend permanency goals for children, however in some cases it took a long time to achieve permanency.

Although reviewers noted recent improvements in moving cases forward to permanency, several cases reviewed still had significant delays in achieving termination of parental rights that resulted in major delays in achieving adoption.

The review found that permanency issues need to be addressed in a more effective manner in DYRS cases. The cases did not provide any indication that steps were being made to achieve permanency for these children.

Older youth in foster care received Independent Living life skills and other supportive services and independent living plans were included in case records.

Case reviews found significant child-specific recruitment efforts were made for children with special needs.

The State utilized specialized foster homes for children with significant health and/or mental health issues that became permanent families.

Delays in finalizing adoptions were noted in several of the cases evaluated. These delays included the length of time to go through the Interstate Compact on the Placement of Children process; the lack of readily available adoptive families; the length of time for adoption training to be held; court appeals on termination of parental rights orders; and the time necessary to check criminal records. These delays resulted in cases taking 24 to 40 months to terminate parental rights with an additional two to three years to finalize the adoptions.

Long-term foster care was found to be an appropriate permanency goal for several children in the cases assessed.

- 80.95% of the cases reviewed substantially achieved Permanency Outcome 2: The continuity of family relationships and connections will be preserved for children.

In the cases evaluated, placements were usually made in the same community as the family and children tended to stay in the same school.

The case review indicated that the agency made attempts to place siblings together and when siblings were separated, this was generally due to the child's needs and was appropriate.

A lack of planning for and carrying out visitation between siblings was found in 37% of the cases evaluated.

The review indicated that primary connections between children and extended family were maintained, when appropriate, while children were in foster care.

Grandparents were involved in family activities for children in foster care.

Case reviews indicated that relatives were diligently sought out, evaluated and considered for placement and that efforts were made to identify unavailable or unknown fathers.

Visits were used to reinforce parenting skills.

### **Status of Permanency Outcomes: Not in Substantial Conformity**

## **III. Child and Family Well-Being**

- 66.67% of the cases reviewed substantially achieved Well-Being Outcome 1: Families will have enhanced capacity to provide for their children's needs.

The review found that there was a lack of comprehensive assessments for children and families being served by the agency. This lack of assessments contributed to children and families not receiving appropriate services to meet their needs, which often resulted in cases being closed without the provision of necessary services.

Case reviews documented the use of specialized assessments on sexual abuse, physical health and mental health to identify specific needs of the child and family.

Important issues for the family such as substance abuse, past sexual abuse and grief/loss issues were not identified.

The review found that there was broad-based involvement of families, foster parents and some children in case planning statewide. Stakeholder groups of parents and foster parents were aware of case issues and were involved in planning and case reviews.

There was evidence provided in two of the sites reviewed that workers exceeded the required frequency of visits in both in-home child protective services and foster care cases.

In one site reviewed, five of the in-home child protective services cases did not meet the State's requirements for CPS contact with the child.

### **Status of Well-Being Outcome WB1: Not in Substantial Conformity**

- 87.88% of the cases reviewed substantially achieved Well-Being Outcome 2: School-age children will have educational achievement appropriate to their abilities.

Individualized Education Plans and specialized education services were addressed in the cases evaluated in one site.

Workers were found to have good communication with schools and the foster care records reviewed included education information.

Educational information was generally not gathered for the in-home child protective services cases evaluated by one of the review teams unless education was singled out as a significant issue.

### **Status of Well-Being Outcome WB2: Not in Substantial Conformity**

- 92.11% of the cases reviewed substantially achieved Well-Being 3: Children will receive adequate services to meet their physical and mental health needs.

Physical health was assessed in the cases evaluated. Medical and dental exams were current in the foster care cases reviewed.

The review found special attention was paid to children with sexual abuse issues.

Mental health assessments were generally found in the foster care cases. Children received mental health services when the issue was identified.

There was a lack of assessments and mental health services for in-home child protective services cases.

### **Status of Well-Being Outcome WB3: In Substantial Conformity**

#### **Key Findings for Seven Systemic Factors**

##### **I. Statewide Information System**

Stakeholders reported that FACTS readily identifies the status, basic demographic data, location, goals and tracks every child through the child welfare system.

Stakeholders explained that the system provides excellent coverage of a case from investigation through permanency and supervisors indicated that FACTS has the ability to track the caseloads of staff.

Stakeholders noted that hardware is outdated and software for DFS staff hampers communications with other systems.

### **Status of Statewide Information System: Substantial Conformity**

##### **II. Case Review System**

Stakeholders indicated that the Plan for Child in Care is a strong tool that addresses the child's needs.

Stakeholder interviews and case reviews indicate that case plans are routinely in place for families and children.

The review found that some case plans did not contain outcome-oriented goals, but just listed the services provided to the child and family. There was little indication of the progress made toward the goals of the case plan.

Case reviews showed that all plans were reviewed timely by the courts, agency and the review board.

There is evidence that the quality of periodic reviews has improved due to reduced caseloads, declining staff turnover rates, better casework due to improved in-service and new worker training, and effective supervision.

Although permanency hearings are occurring for all DFS children as seen by the review of cases, DYRS cases are not always receiving permanency hearings statewide.

Some stakeholders explained that automated tracking to ensure timely permanency hearings is not occurring in the FACTS system.

Guardians-ad-litem are not appointed for all children who are abused, neglected or dependent.

Stakeholders noted vast improvements in the timeliness of filing termination of parental rights petitions.

State stakeholders indicated that there are delays in the length of time to terminate parental rights, which extends the timelines for finalization of adoptions. These delays are caused by failures to make early permanency determinations during the initial assessment process, court delays involving extensive continuances and appeals, lack of strong advocacy in courts for prompt terminations, and State policy which requires that children be placed for 12 months in an adoptive home before seeking finalization of the adoption.

Stakeholders in Kent and Sussex County indicated that foster parents receive adequate notice of hearings and are given an opportunity to be heard during the hearing.

## **Status of Case Review System: Substantial Conformity**

### **III. Quality Assurance System**

Stakeholders indicated that workers were aware of standards in such areas as timeliness of investigations, contact with families, and medical treatment in foster care.

Case reviews showed that safety is addressed in case plans.

Stakeholders commented that Delaware has a Quality Assurance system in place that regularly reviews a random sample of cases.

### **Status of Quality Assurance System: Substantial Conformity**

## **IV. Training**

DFS staff stated that new worker pre-service training is a positive tool. Stakeholders statewide reported that many improvements have been made to enhance pre-service training for staff.

Staff in New Castle County explained that they now have "coaches", mentors and "over-hires" to improve casework practice and reduce staff turnover.

Stakeholders reported that DYRS staff do not have the same level of training as DFS staff. Training for DYRS staff does not include pre-service.

Interviews with staff noted that DFS offers comprehensive in-service training for staff, most of which is mandatory.

Stakeholders indicated a need for more options for in-service training content such as legal aspects, substance abuse, attachment disorders, adolescent issues, termination of parental rights proceedings and adoption, and sexual abuse issues.

Foster parents are trained using the Child Welfare League of America's PRIDE curriculum. Foster parents reported in stakeholder interviews that this training is positive and useful.

### **Status of Training: Substantial Conformity**

## **V. Service Array**

Intensive (in-home) reunification services, preservation and support services, and outpatient substance abuse services were sufficiently available in several sites.

The Title IV-E Demonstration/Waiver project allows substance abuse workers to accompany DFS workers to homes.



Case reviews and stakeholders indicated that there is a wide array of parenting services in Kent County including parent aides and parenting classes. There are no waiting lists for parent aide services.

DYRS has a Multi-System Therapy (MST) program which is a statewide home-based diversion service for juveniles.

Stakeholders reported that the medical resources at A.I. Dupont Hospital have been very helpful.

Kent County cases indicated that individualized services were utilized such as wraparound services, Boys and Girls Clubs, family preservation, and intensive reunification services.

Family preservation services (information and referral, in-home counseling and parent aides) in Sussex County were individualized to meet the needs of children and families as shown by the cases examined.

Stakeholders reported gaps in services including in-state group and/or residential treatment, "step-down" placements to bring children back to Delaware from out-of-state, therapeutic placement options, services for adolescents, independent living and transitional living services, wraparound services, post adoption services, mental health treatment, substance abuse treatment, and crisis services for foster parents to support and maintain placements.

Stakeholders and case reviews in New Castle County indicated that services were individualized to meet the needs of children and families.

The cases examined in the review showed that flexible funding was used to provide individualized services. Stakeholders indicated that DYRS cases in Kent County were unable to utilize flexible funding due to a lack of availability and administrative difficulties.

Case reviews and stakeholders found that services for adolescent group homes, independent living services, and behavioral health were less available in Sussex County than in the other counties.

### **Status of Service Array: Substantial Conformity**

## **VI. Agency Responsiveness to the Community**

Stakeholders indicated that there was regular consultation between the State Agency and the Department of Education, child placing agencies, mandated reporters, Family Court, and interagency committees.

Statewide stakeholders reported issues, concerns, and frustrations with the lack of coordination among DFS, DYRS and Division of Children's Mental Health.

### **Status of Agency Responsiveness to the Community: Substantial Conformity**

## **VII. Foster and Adoptive Parent Licensing, Recruitment and Retention**

Stakeholders indicated that foster homes are studied according to acceptable standards, and are reviewed annually and on time.

Stakeholders support the foster home coordinators who provide training, coordination with other staff, and support to foster parents.

All foster parents, relatives and non-relatives, are held to the same licensing standards and that licensing reviews are conducted regularly.

All counties indicated that criminal background checks are completed on a timely basis.

Stakeholders reported that a One Church - One Child program is underway and that new efforts are in progress to increase use of the media in foster and adoptive parent recruitment. A statewide foster care reform taskforce has been created to increase recruitment and address foster parent retention.

Stakeholders indicated that licensing standards for foster family homes and child care institutions are uniformly implemented on a statewide basis.

State and local stakeholders reported a general need for foster homes to meet the needs of children coming into care.

State and local stakeholders reported regular use of exchanges, photolistings and Internet services to facilitate adoptive placements.

## **Status of Foster and Adoptive Parent Licensing, Recruitment and Retention: Substantial Conformity**

Through an analysis of the review indicators, the team determined that Delaware has not substantially achieved six of the seven outcomes. All seven systemic factors are substantially achieved.

Subsequent to the review, three inconsistencies were found in the review. Delaware's responses on the three issues have been incorporated into the final report.

A discussion of the complete findings of this review is included in the Summary of Findings.

A program improvement plan is required to address the six outcomes. The program improvement plan must include measures to bring each outcome up to substantial achievement and to bring the statewide data indicators up to the national standard or to a level that is agreed upon. The safety outcomes are to be given priority in the plan and must be addressed in less than two years. The State is required to submit a program improvement plan to the Region III Office within 90 days of receipt of this full report.

The Region III staff will work with Delaware to develop the program improvement plan. The Regional Administrator will then review the completed plan and notify the State as to approval or disapproval. In the event that the program improvement plan is not approved, the State will have an opportunity to submit a revised plan.